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Update On Water Quality

U.S. Department of Agriculture



Progress Update #13

April/May 1992

Seminars of Risk Assessment Management

The Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, Ann Veneman, has endorsed the presentation of informative seminars for USDA executives on risk assessment, management and communication.

The initial seminar was presented in December by Dr. Warner North, President of the Society for Risk Analysis. He spoke of the role of science and decisionmakers in risk analysis and management. His emphasis was on the utility of the disciplined approach provided by risk analysis methods for defining the dimensions of problems and developing information on the nature and of risk associated with action options.

The May seminar by Dr. Peter Sandman addressed the factors contributing to the public's "outrage" when involuntarily exposed to environmental hazards and how to communicate under those circumstances.

These seminars are being arranged to encourage USDA executives and their agencies to deal with hazards, risk and uncertainties in a more systematic manner and to communicate risk more effectively to the public. Science and Education has the responsibility for arranging the seminars, working with the USDA agencies and their policy officials. For more information contact John Fedldw, OBPA, 720-7963.

USDA To Evaluate Water Quality Projects

As part of the President's Water Quality Initiative, 16 USDA Demonstration Projects or Hydrologic Unit Area projects have been selected for assessment of their effects on water quality.

They were chosen to represent the Demonstration Projects and HUA sites that will address, over the next few years, the impact of agricultural practices on surface and ground water quality. The projects are under the joint leadership of the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), Extension Service (ES), and Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS).

The 16 projects represent a broad spectrum of physical conditions—soil, terrain, hydrology, and climate and farm types and agricultural practices. The projects are located in Alabama, California, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota,

Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin. A paramount aim of the USDA Initiative is to provide agricultural producers with the knowledge and means to voluntarily take action on their water quality concerns. Because it is difficult to accurately relate improvements in water quality to specific changes in agricultural management, the assessment will emphasize the implementation of land treatment measures that improve the efficiency of nutrient and pesticide use on problem soils.

The assessment team will ensure accuracy of data by monitoring the work of project staff and providing technical assistance and training.

The findings will be applied in developing future USDA water quality programs. Assessment reports are expected to be available in March 1993 and March 1995. For more information call John Sutton, SCS, at (202) 720-0122.

Improving Quality of Water Entering Estuaries

A conference in Providence, Rhode Island, this October will be the setting for discussing ways to improve interagency coordination, accelerate activity, and the use of existing funding to improve the quality of water flowing into the Nation's estuaries. Attending will be nonpoint source coordinators for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, regional representatives of the National

Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) liaisons to EPA regional offices. Discussions will center on the new Coastal Zone Management Guidance to be issued this summer, work being done under the Water Quality Act of 1987, and USDA's water quality initiative. For more information call Harvey Mack, SCS, at 720-1871.

Nutrient And Pesticide Training Workshops

Nutrient and pesticide management are an integral part of most conservation management systems. Chemical and organic fertilizers, along with pesticides, are often identified resources. Each State needs to tailor specific actions for the management of these chemicals using the framework of SCS's National Standards and Specifications for Nutrient and Pest Management.

To be prepared for this effort, a course for agrichemical water quality training was developed in two phases, which has been held monthly from December 1991 to March 1992 at SCS's four National Technical Centers (NTC). The NTC's are located in Portland, OR (West NTC), Ft. Worth, TX (South NTC), Lincoln, NE (Midwest NTC),

and Chester, PA (Northeast NTC).

The purpose of Phase I training was to provide guidance on how to develop and implement nutrient and pest management components in conservation planning at the field office level. Phase I was a "Train-the-Trainer" approach for State and NTC agronomists, environmental engineers, and other technical specialists involved in nutrient and pest management programs in SCS. Participants of Phase I training will deliver Phase II training on nutrient and pest management to State, area, and field office personnel. All guidance and planning documents and training materials developed during Phase I training will be provided to the participants to assist them in organizing and developing their Phase II State level training.

Coordinator To Work In Great Lakes

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service (SCS) has assigned a nonpoint source expert to coordinate its water quality activities in the eight Great Lakes states. Duties include working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), state water quality agencies, and local officials on remedial action plans

for 43 identified areas of concern and lakewide management plans for the drainage basins of the five Great Lakes.

The SCS Great Lakes coordinator will also provide technical leadership to SCS staff assigned to state water quality agencies. For more information contact Harvey Mack, SCS, at 720-1871.

Program To Identify Areas Prone To Problems

The national water quality technology development staff of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Soil Conservation Service is working with the USDA Economic Research Service and the National Center for Resource Innovations to produce a document that identifies areas in the United States that have the potential for ground water

contamination from agricultural chemicals. A Geographic Information System was used to apply National Resource Inventory sample points, soils data, and a pesticide-use data base to a vulnerability model.

Limited copies will be available in June 1992. For more information call George Rohaley, SCS, 720-5405.



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